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1. Challenges facing new farmers and ranchers.

- Land prices, farm consolidation, integration of agricultural production into fewer, larger enterprises, and commodity programs that encourage over-production drive down farm prices resulting in a discouraging climate for new and beginning farmers, effectively serving as an entry barrier to farming.
- **ACTION:** Fund grant and very low interest loan programs as well as USDA support for farm transition programs would benefit new farmers.
- **ACTION:** Congressional and USDA support for farmland preservation efforts, including easements and zoning.

2. Competitiveness of US agriculture.

- Agricultural competitiveness is currently predicated on the idea that production is (1) commodity-based, (2) produced for overseas markets, and (3) of added value that is captured by intermediaries. Often agricultural competitiveness isn't so much a concern for farm income but the viability of farms to supply cheap raw materials for intermediary processors and marketers, who capture a very large proportion of the value of agricultural products through economies of scale.
- Agricultural competitiveness could, rather, be focused on individual farms, rural communities, and small local processors. This would allow the value to be captured not by a corporate intermediary but by the people at the local level who produce, process, and consume agricultural products.
- **ACTION:** Reduce or eliminate commodity supports for production-oriented agribusiness firms, which include very large farms and ranches. This would remove an incentive for consolidation and free funds for small farm programs.

3. Distribution of farm program benefits.

- Most of the benefits of farm programs go to the largest producers based upon historical production.
- The Conservation Security Program is a very good program that seeks to support farmers and ranchers that farm wisely, relying on ecological services and developing production practices to increase, sustain, maintain, and promote those services, whether they be soil health, water quality, wildlife habitat, sustainable cropping systems that rely on natural systems for pest control and fertility, etc.
- **ACTION:** Fund the CSP program appropriately so farmers and ranchers in every watershed in the US can apply every year.
- **ACTION:** Reduce or at the very least cap commodity payments to free up more resources for small and family farmers.

4. Conservation and environmental goals.

- Conservation goals should be synonymous with production goals, realizing the systems orientation of agriculture.
- Agriculture is a human manipulation of a natural system. Sustainable agriculture seeks to understand the inherent linkages and connections between people, plants, soils, water, wild animals, livestock, crops, and the communities that rely on them. By managing from a systems perspective, agriculture can be *sustainable* as well as productive.
- **ACTION:** Fund specific conservation and working lands programs that serve to foster environmental conservation while developing opportunities to sustain agricultural production to feed and clothe local communities. Example: CSP.

5. Rural economic growth.

- Rural economic growth is built upon viable communities and local businesses. Programs and initiatives that favor industrial agriculture, displace small and family farms, and encourage low-wage employment serve to further rural decline and speed rural flight.
- Programs that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development, along with proactive steps to foster small and family farms, would be much better for rural communities than the meager employment opportunities offered by large retail stores and call centers in rural environments.
- **ACTION:** USDA support for small business development, including processing and value-added opportunities for local farm products.

6. Expand products, market, and research.

- **ACTION:** Fund research and community-building programs to foster small-farms, urban agriculture, farmers markets, and CSA's. Programs that serve to remove barriers to entry by new farmers can be utilized as well to foster markets in urban areas.

- **ACTION:** Utilize the extensive infrastructure of the Cooperative Extension system to conduct research and education appropriate to small farms and local food systems. Many good models exist, such as the Washington State University Small Farms Program.
- Early this fall the NOSB recommended to USDA that the rule include language to the effect that organic dairies utilize pasture as a significant part of their feedstuffs in producing organic milk. The idea was to uphold the integrity of 'organic' by necessitating actual grazing as a basis of organic milk production. The recommendation was rejected and this undermines not only the NOSB, but the integrity of organic agriculture.
- **ACTION:** USDA should work to uphold organic integrity as a production system that meets the demand of a rapidly growing market. This system is relied upon by food eaters who wish to purchase and eat products that are truly organic, not organic merely in name.